

ADDRESSING HUNGER AND NUTRITION

A Tool Kit for Positive Results



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Summer Food Service Program

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The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federal entitlement program that reimburses sponsors that serve free, nutritious meals and snacks to low-income children during the summer months. The program most frequently operates in conjunction with summer activities such as summer school or summer recreation programs. Providing free meals can be a way to draw children into summer activities that are safe, fun and filled with learning opportunities.

SFSP is administered at the federal level through the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). At the state level, the program is most frequently administered by the state education agency. In local communities, SFSP is operated by sponsors such as school districts, local government agencies or nonprofit organizations. Sponsors are reimbursed by the USDA, through the state agency, for meals served and for documented operating costs.

SFSP operates in three different types of program sites.

- Camps are reimbursed for meals served to children from households with incomes at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Enrolled sites provide free meals to all children enrolled in a specific activity or program. At least half the children at an enrolled site must be from households with incomes at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Open sites are located in neighborhoods where 50 percent or more of the children in the defined geographic area are from households with incomes at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level. At open sites, meals are served to any child who comes to receive a meal.

The state agency is responsible for approving meal sites as camps, enrolled or open.

Eligibility and Benefits

Children age 18 and younger are eligible to receive two meals per day under the Summer Food Service Program. Disabled individuals over age 18 who participate in school programs

for the mentally or physically disabled also can receive meals through the program. Camps and meal sites that serve migrant children can serve up to three meals per child each day.

Program Issues and Challenges

Transportation

A common challenge to the Summer Food Service Program in reaching all eligible children is a lack of transportation to bring children to the food site. During the school year, meals are served to children in one common location, a school. When

school is not in session, there is not a common location to reach large numbers of children. The challenge of getting children to a summer food service site is of particular concern in rural areas where homes are spread out and a central location such as a school or park may be a considerable distance away.

Establishing Meal Sites and Site Location

Another barrier that prevents the Summer Food Service Program from reaching all eligible children is establishing enough summer food sites in appropriate locations. It is necessary for program sponsors to strategically locate food sites to address areas of need and serve the maximum number of children.

Providing Meals to Teens

Community leaders report a particular challenge in attracting teenagers to participate in the Summer Food Service Program. Teens are reluctant to go to summer food sites, since the program primarily serves children; teens like to be in places where there are other teens. Although programming and adding activities can help draw teens their participation in the program remains low.

In fiscal year 2004:

- SFSP served 117 million meals at 30,600 sites.
- The federal government spent \$262 million on the program.
- Meal site sponsors can be reimbursed up to \$2.41 per meal served under SFSP; a reimbursement for administration also is provided.

Program Models and Promising Practices

Transportation

In **South Carolina** the Horry County Council sponsors the Summer Food Service Program for the county at traditional locations such as schools and churches, and through a mobile meal site that serves pockets of poverty. Three trucks are used to bring meals to each mobile site, and meals are served picnic-style. In addition to reaching underserved areas, this program helps to employ school bus drivers who otherwise might not have work during the summer. Since each of the mobile sites serves a small number of children (fewer than 30), program administrators find this solution more cost-effective than establishing a separate meal site in each location.

Increasing Summer Food Service Sites

In **California**, the Sacramento Hunger Commission (funded jointly by the city and county) partnered with the city Department of Parks and Recreation (which sponsors the Summer Food Service Program in the city) to increase the number of summer food service sites. Representatives from the Sacramento Hunger Commission met with each city council member to obtain their support in establishing program feeding sites. Members of the city council were able to help identify underserved areas of need in their district, and also to elicit support from program sponsors to meet the unaddressed need. As a result of this partnership, the city Parks and Recreation Department also began providing program data on a city council district-by-district basis. This helped city council members measure availability of the Summer Food Service Program in their district from year to year.

A **District of Columbia** task force, appointed by the mayor and comprised of representatives from local food service providers and advocacy agencies, the business community, and local foundations, worked in partnership with elected city council members to increase the availability of the Summer Food Service Program. Through these partnerships, program infrastructure was strengthened by establishing the city Parks

and Recreation Department as a program sponsor. Several D.C. City Council members have championed this issue, helping to strengthen program oversight and publicize the need for additional program sponsors. This support from elected city council members has helped to strengthen state agency leadership in the program. Finally, partnerships with the private sector have sponsored taste-tests and local advertisements to raise awareness about the availability of free summer meals.

Private Sector Partners

The “Fueling Young Minds” collaboration in Milwaukee, **Wisconsin**, helped to expand the Summer Food Service Program during the summer of 2004. Partners in this collaboration included the Milwaukee Public School System, the local community action agency (Social Development Commission), the Salvation Army, the Hunger Task Force (a food bank and advocacy agency), Impact 211, and the Harley-Davidson Foundation. Recognized by the USDA with a Sunshine Award, this partnership is unique because it includes the support of a private sector foundation. The Harley-Davidson Foundation contributed financial resources for program outreach and marketing. Collaboration partners plan to continue their work during the upcoming summer.

USDA Model Programs Guide

Additional model programs for the Summer Food Service Program, including conducting outreach, using mobile feeding sites, and reaching under served populations can be found in the USDA's *Model Programs Guide* at http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/summer/states/model_programs.html.

The USDA's *2005 Model Programs Handbook* can be found at http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/summer/library/Model_Programs_Booklet_2005.pdf.

Resources

- Federal Program Overview: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/summer/>
- State Agency Contacts: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm>

Contact Information:

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Definitions of commonly used hunger and nutrition terms can be found in NCSL's Hunger and Nutrition Partnership *Glossary of Hunger and Nutrition Terms* at <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/immig/Glossary.htm>.